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**The Neutrality and Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of  
Sweden during the Second World War**

*Bachelor Thesis*

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## **Anotace (Abstrakt)**

Bakalárska práca „The Neutrality and Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Sweden during the Second World War“ sa zaoberá vývojom neutrality Švédskeho kráľovstva počas Druhej svetovej vojny v závislosti na medzinárodnom vývoji a medzinárodnej politike vedenej zo Štokholmu. Časovo je zasadená najmä do obdobia konfliktu, ale obsahuje tiež historický exkurz do medzivojnového obdobia, ktoré je dôležité pre ďalšiu argumentáciu a vývoj témy. Je v ňom tiež obsiahnutá analýza Haagskej konvencie o neutralite z roku 1907, s ktorou porovnávam odchýlky, ktorých sa švédska vláda počas vojny dopustila. Práca sa zaoberá okrem popisu a analýzy zahraničnej politiky aj ekonomickým a obchodným potenciálom Švédska a jeho schopnosťou ozbrojenej obrany. Ďalej popisuje vzťahy Švédska k bojujúcim stranám v bezprostrednej blízkosti a ich vplyv na zahraničnú politiku. Na základe argumentov, ktoré som uviedol, je v závere bakalárskej práce celková politika neutrality zhodnotená.

## **Abstract**

Bachelor thesis „The Neutrality and Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Sweden during the Second World War“ deals with the development of neutrality of Kingdom of Sweden during the Second World War depending on international development of affairs and foreign policy from Stockholm. Events are situated to the duration of conflict but it also contains historical excursion to inter-war period which is important for argumentation and further development of topic. Analysis of Hague Convention of 1907 is also included and it is compared with deviations of war-time foreign policy. Thesis deals not only with development of foreign policy but also with economic and trade potencial of Sweden and with ability of armed defence. Further it describes relations with belligerent powers in immediate imminence and their effect on foreign policy. Based on argumets I had stated, policy of neutrality is evaluated in the end of thesis.

## **Bibliografický záznam**

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## **Kľúčové slová**

Švédsko, zahraniční politika, neutralita, Druhá světová válka, obchod, obrana

## **Keywords**

Sweden, foreign policy, neutrality, Second World War, trade, defence

## **Pod'akovanie**

Na tomto mieste by som rád poďakoval vedúcemu svojej práce doc. PhDr. Petrovi Svobodnému, Ph.D. za cenné rady, trpezlivosť a pomoc pri tvorbe tejto práce.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	- 8 -
Swedish Foreign Policy before World War II.....	- 10 -
Swedish Economic Potential .....	- 12 -
Concept of Neutrality .....	- 14 -
A Potential Theater of War .....	- 16 -
Sweden during the Second World War and phases of its Neutrality .....	- 17 -
Phase One: From the Attack on Poland to the Inception of the Winter War .....	- 19 -
Phase Two: From the Winter War 1939 to the Attack on Denmark and Norway 1940 .	- 20 -
Phase Three: From the Attack on Denmark and Norway 1940 to the War Turning Point in 1943 .....	- 22 -
Options of Swedish Military Defence .....	- 26 -
Phase Four: From the Landings of Allies in Italy in 1943 to the First Half of 1944 .....	- 30 -
Sweden's Aid to Its Neighbours.....	- 31 -
Phase Five: From the Second Half of 1944 to the End of War in 1945 .....	- 32 -
Evaluation of the Neutrality Policy .....	- 33 -
References .....	- 36 -

## Introduction

During World War II, the Kingdom of Sweden successfully avoided direct combat and turning its territory into a war area. The Scandinavian states had declared neutrality. However, Sweden was the only one that was able to maintain it. This was possible thanks to the flexible foreign policy and use of the given circumstances that created an island of freedom in an occupied Europe swept with war. Among its neighbours, Sweden is a unique example of state that led active neutrality policy in the inter-war period and during war and had contributed to the rebuilding of Europe after ceasing hostilities.

After the First World War, Sweden had actively contributed to international policies focused on mediating conflicts and preventing similar military catastrophe that had just ended. It was closely cooperating with the rest of Europe within the League of Nations. After 1936, when this system of collective security had failed, Sweden refused to join any supranational emerging alliance. Because of its geopolitical position and international situation, Sweden resorted to declaration of neutrality that was supposed to prevent fighting on its territory. Neutrality has been a traditional value for Sweden since the end of Napoleonic Wars, last Swedish armed engagement in foreign territory.

After the fighting started and German aggression made its way through Europe, Swedish foreign policy was influenced by several factors. Important conditions were Swedish involvement in interwar diplomacy and current position of the country on economic and geopolitical map of Europe. After the First World War, Sweden became dependent on international trade and on import from abroad, mainly of coal, coke and food while it exported iron, wood, industrial products, such as ball bearings or their parts. Geopolitically speaking, Sweden was one of the main actors engaged in European politics seeking mediation of conflicts during interwar period. It was an irreplaceable source of natural resources and industrial products for future combatant sides especially because of its high quality iron ore and ball bearings that were among the most quality products of their kind in the world.

The moral dilemma of the performance during the Second World War was a characteristic phenomenon dividing Swedish society which considered itself as part of the western society. Sweden relied on armed neutrality focused on defence of its own territory but did not have the capacity to influence foreign military operations or to help its neighbours. Swedish help was only material and diplomatic, yet Sweden also tried to compromise with Germany and supported German military production with its export of iron ore and ball bearings.



What were the options of a small Nordic state that was not self-sustaining and was dependent on import of important commodities? What would have been a sense of being a part of the military conflict for the sake of defending democracy when their endeavours were not supported by world powers in the course of the interwar period? Was Swedish behaviour only opportunistic? This controversial era of Swedish history during the most destructive conflict of our times contains many questions.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the performance of Sweden during the Second World War. It focuses on foreign policy, especially development of the course of war events. In order to do so, first I have to introduce Sweden during interwar period; mainly its foreign policy, economic situation and strategic position in Europe's north. Consequently, I will introduce neutrality as a concept in international law so I can analyse and evaluate Sweden's neutral stance during the entire conflict under the circumstances of international situation. There are various perspectives on development of Sweden's neutrality which I will introduce and compare their differences with the assistance of historical data. Military insight is also important to see the possibilities of eventual defence against Wehrmacht. In the end of the paper I will try to answer following questions: "What were the options of minor Nordic state that was not self-sustaining and was dependent on import of important commodities?", "Would it have been reasonable to be a part of the military conflict for the sake of defending democracy when its endeavours were not supported by the League of Nations members during the interwar period?" or "Was Swedish behaviour opportunistic?".

In this thesis I will not focus on comparison of Swedish neutrality during the Second World War with that of Switzerland and of other neutral European countries. I will rather focus only on Swedish neutrality and its development aimed on foreign policy and international events. I used Swedish historical monographs in English and Polish language, journal articles of Swedish diplomats expressing their thoughts on policy of neutrality and economic publications and journals for additional data to back up any argumentation on Swedish-German war trade. I used lots of data on Swedish military capacity from historical monographs to back up another important argument, self-defence. I used Hague Convention of 1907 to introduce neutrality itself and analyse if Swedish politicians stuck to their obligation. In the end, I enclosed narrative development of Swedish neutrality and I think that this topic possesses great potential for further research.

## Swedish Foreign Policy before World War II

Just after the end of the First World War, Sweden had found itself to be economically dependent on import from Europe and the United States. Foreign trade of goods was extremely important for its industry and population which suffered from food shortages and worker unrests. During the Entente's blockade of German coast, Sweden lost contact with its most important and closest trade partner. However, Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, Swedish prime minister from 1914 to 1917, was reluctant to bend rules of neutrality and open trade routes with Great Britain and her allies. Shortly after war, his actions caused social and economic problems, even hunger marches, due to damaged economy. In 1917- 1918 there were social democratic reforms, universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy reforms to strengthen social welfare of citizens and working class to withstand influence and ideological pressure from Russia. Question of financing social reforms versus defence spending was huge issue in Swedish parliament Riksdag. In the end, defence budget was stripped by one third which hit hard navy and 17 infantry regiments got disbanded in 1925. Per Albin Hansson's as Minister of War had vision of "Folkhemmet"; a fatherland for all Swedes and for that he needed resources for social reforms. This played huge role later during war where he was appointed as Prime Minister and architect of neutral policy, so it is logical that he was unwilling to abandon decades of economic growth and set Sweden to post-First World War state.<sup>1</sup>

The character of economy dependent on import was one of the arguments against isolationist policy that was popular among rightist parties. Conservatives, with their leader Hjalmar Hammarskjöld, were concerned that if Sweden joins the League of Nations, it will be forced to take part in sanctions against Germany because of the Versailles system treaty, with which the Swedish did not agree. They sympathised with the Triple Entente at the end of the war, yet Swedish Prime Minister Hjalmar Branting said in 1923: "Surround Germany... Treat it as a madman of Europe, take any action against it, and one day, Germany will escape its cage with fury of a madman"<sup>2</sup> he quite closely predicted the future development.

The vote on joining of Sweden in the League of Nations took place on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> March 1920 and Stockholm was ready to break the foundation of their neutrality in order to join the organization of collective security that contradicted the neutrality<sup>3</sup>. Swedish politicians became actively involved in

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<sup>1</sup> John Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish experience in the Second World War*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Cited according to Franklin D. Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, c1988), p.501.

<sup>3</sup> Swedish Neutrality and Its Abandonment, <http://www.iticu.edu.tr/yayin/dergi/s11/M00167.pdf>, p. 185.

policy-making of conflict mediation within the League of Nations such as the solution of Turkish-Iraqi border dispute in 1924. They viewed this policy as a possible alternative of defence for a small state surrounded by great powers. Part of the League of Nations involvement was support of right to self-determination of new founded states in Europe. On eastern parts of borders of Sweden rose Finland and Poland but most important, Baltic States. These states were important as buffer regions for traditional enemy- Russia.

However, as soon as 1919, Swedish sense for abiding valid treaties was put through a difficult test because of decision of the League of Nations to cede Åland Islands to Finland. Its population who spoke Swedish, decided in petition in 1919 to secede from Finland. Even though Sweden did not agree with this, it conformed to the decision of the League of Nations.

During the 1930s, Swedish politicians were regularly disappointed by actions of the League of Nations. Among these actions was French occupation of Saarland, Italian action against Corfu in 1920s, unsuccessful disarmament conference in Geneva in 1932, Japanese invasion to Manchuria in 1931-32 and the attack of Fascist Italy against Ethiopia in 1935. They disagreed with all these actions in the frame of the League of Nations and they were not identifying with idleness of great powers that could not overcome their differences and cooperated instead. Sweden became more and more aware that the League of Nations was unable to protect small states and as an institution was highly ineffective<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore, in 1936, Sweden eventually began to actively prepare its defence. Military alliance of the entire Scandinavia failed mainly because the individual states had different interests and different enemies. There was possibility to tie Baltic States into alliance but it failed because of many differences between possible members. Denmark shared borders with Germany, Finland and Baltic States with the Soviet Union. Sweden and Norway were close to Great Britain. Further alliance could not focus on one enemy and allied itself with other Great power. It became useless and nobody wanted to side and was not even prepared to side in possible conflict. Attempt to remilitarize Åland Islands was vetoed by the Soviet Union. Moscow was also in favour of Scandinavian neutrality because of closer ties with Germany than with them. Neutral trade, shortage of allies and demilitarized Åland Islands were aims of Soviet support of Scandinavian neutral alliance.

Finally in 1938, the Nordic states declared neutrality and ceased to take part in policies of the League of Nations. In Sweden, defence was actively prepared, although there were struggles between politicians about investment in defence or social programme and this caused greatest problems and

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<sup>4</sup> Franklin D. Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, c1988), p.501.

delays. Denmark, in contrast, invested its resources only in social policy and Norway did only very little for its military and defence<sup>5</sup>.

The approach of Western powers' appeasement against the aggressive politics of Hitler and Mussolini, the steps adopted by Sweden's neighbours, their interwar diplomatic endeavours and fear of social restlessness and the memory of material shortage from the First World War were other facts that affected the decision-making of its politicians in the formulation of its foreign policy in the following years.

## **Swedish Economic Potential**

Scandinavian region went through distinct change and development since the end of the First World War. It economically strengthened, the number of citizens rose, the emigration numbers fell down. These states even ranked high in world economic charts. They had one of the biggest trade fleets and in 1933, Sweden and Norway controlled, thanks to their forests, 24% of world pulp production, 16% of wood production and 6% of paper production. Together with Denmark, they were responsible for a huge part of world bacon production and a quarter of production of butter and eggs. In 1936, the population of Scandinavia rose to 12 million and it rated as fourth biggest importer in the world<sup>6</sup>. Sweden particularly imported coal for heating, up to 6 500 000 tons per year, coke for the industry, food and "colonial" goods, such as coffee that was very popular in Sweden.

Because there are only few coalmines on the Swedish territory, practically all coal had to be imported. Coal was bought in Germany, where 75% of overall Swedish export of iron ore went to. During the 1830's, Great Britain bought 12% of Swedish iron ore at most. Since 1927, the Gränsberg Law limited the amount of iron ore export to 9 million tons per year. This limit only rose, except for the Great Depression and stopped at 11 million tons at the end of the inter-war period<sup>7</sup>.

Export of iron ore, together with ball bearings, was the most controversial question during the war because it directly supported German military industry. On the other hand, because of its geographic position, Sweden did not have any other option than to trade with Germany. Especially, after the occupation of Denmark and Norway that meant brake of contact with the West. Questions emerged after the war were: To what extent did Swedish support the German military industry?

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<sup>5</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 45.

<sup>6</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.503.

<sup>7</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.503.

Would it have been able to limit or stop the course of war with restrictions of export? And finally did Germany exploit monopolistic position towards Sweden?

The iron ore exported to Germany contained an order of magnitude higher proportion of iron than the ore that Germany controlled before the war. This situation lasted until 1940 when Germany occupied French mines and was therefore able to cover part of the import from Sweden with these resources. But with occupation of Czechoslovakian and Polish mines and later French coal resources, Germans were unable to maintain pre-war levels of production and coal shortages became imminent after the war broke out. Reason behind it was lack of professional labour and ineffective compulsory labour<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding trade relations between Sweden and Germany, Hedberg and Håkansson are examining in their paper trade of coal, iron ore and paint between Germany and Sweden on the bases of interwar and wartime prices. They reached conclusion that Germany, in this relationship, did not exploit this position even though it was dominant. Instead of that, prices showed that Germans, in this crucial part of interstate trade, were preferring stability in prices and relations. Hedberg and Håkansson are therefore considering their behaviour in this trade agreement as non-monopolistic<sup>9</sup>.

In the case of Germany and Great Britain, Swedish ball bearings from the SKF Company were fundamental for production of engines, planes, ships, tanks and a wide scale of other vehicles. SKF had its branches in Germany, in Great Britain and in the United States. The original company was situated in Sweden, from where it exported high quality material, production devices and know-how. It owned patents for processing ball bearings of the highest quality. During the war, 31% of production in Great Britain and 58% of production in Germany originated from this company. In his article, Eric B. Golson analyses the relations between Sweden, Germany and Great Britain and concludes that even though the import and production of this commodity drove German weapon industry, its stopping would not overturn the course of the war. After several months, both sides would be able to alter the missing production, even though it would be logistically and materially demanding. Therefore, the

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Hedberg and Elias Håkansson, *The Nature of German Interwar and Wartime Trade Policies Reloaded: The Swedish- German case*, (paper presented at the XIV International Economic History Congress, Helsinki 21 to 25 August 2006, Session 91, *The Nordic countries and the commercial de-globalization of the interwar period*), p. 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> Hedberg and Håkansson, *The Nature of German Interwar and Wartime Trade Policies Reloaded: The Swedish- German case*, p. 16.

course of the war would be merely slowed down by Sweden which would risk German intervention because of this strategically important product<sup>10</sup>.

In the case of alliance with Western Allies, Sweden would be in danger of possible occupation or siege of its cities, starving and freezing, for it was not a materially independent country. But considering possibility of exploitation of trade link from Germany, we can say, there was no such thing. Hitler was focused on many other more important wartime issues so it was important to maintain economic peace in the North. We can find similarity in trade between Germany and Balkan states focused on meat. They were seeking peaceful trade partner but after Italy's attack on Balkans they were forced to maintain military actions which disrupted this trade and tied lots of Germany's military potential.

These were important arguments that did not allow or did not require Sweden to expose itself to direct involvement in the conflict. The Swedish government was aware of this and was not pleased by the fact that they disposed of commodities that were so immensely important for Germany but their options were very restricted.

## **Concept of Neutrality**

There are two types of neutrality – temporary and permanent. Temporary neutrality is unilaterally declared by a state that does not want to take part in a military conflict while in the case of permanent neutrality, the state in question declares its neutrality via international treaties, such as in the case of Switzerland since 1815 or it has its neutrality embedded in the constitution which is something Austria did in 1955<sup>11</sup>.

Since 1814, Sweden had not taken part in any military conflict; the last combat operations took place in Swedish Finland in 1808. These clashes had only small character and neutrality was declared right after the Napoleonic Wars. However, the Swedish neutrality was temporary but not continuous since the end of the Napoleonic Wars; it was at least twice interrupted – in 1864 during the Prussian-Austrian-Danish War Sweden did declare war but did not take part in combat. During the

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<sup>10</sup> Eric B. Golson, *Did Swedish Ball Bearings Keep the Second War Going?*

[http://www.econhist.gu.se/digitalAssets/1341/1341645\\_golson.pdf](http://www.econhist.gu.se/digitalAssets/1341/1341645_golson.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Zdeněk Hojda, *Jako ježek v nebezpečí. Klikaté cesty švédské neutrality za druhé světové války* (Dějiny a současnost 31, 2009), p.1.

Winter War at the turn of 1939 between Finland and Soviet Union Sweden declared itself as non-fighting country so they could provide material and diplomatic help to their eastern neighbour<sup>12</sup>. Non-belligerence allows country to support one belligerent side in conflict without any official participation in combat but this stance contradicts Hague Convention of 1907<sup>13</sup>. In this case, Swedish leaders chose to officially abolish neutrality for duration of the Winter War.

However, the neutrality itself was not a perfect strategy to keep the country out of military conflicts. Between the 19th century and the World War II, this doctrine had gone through minimum of tests that would make it as concept an effective argument in international politics. It had a character of theoretical juridical concept. Swedish politician and diplomat Gunnar Hägglöf talks about the insecurity of neutrality. He recognizes Balance of power policy; therefore he conditions successful neutrality on equilibrium in international great power relations that makes the ground for international policy<sup>14</sup>. This is valid especially for small states with limited military resources that secured their impartiality with balancing between two powers. In contrast to a stable division of the fighting parties in Europe during the First World War, the events predating the beginning of the World War II – signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and merging of the Communist and Fascist fractions into one – directly affected concept of division of fighting powers and simultaneously the concept of neutrality. It thus became harder for smaller states to oppose the big military powers, to use the balances in international politics and to maintain their independence in case of its possible breaking. Kingdom of Sweden avoided this due to the systematic building of defence with which it could directly support its neutral status and policymaking.<sup>15</sup>

Another issue is whether state declaring neutrality will be recognised by belligerents. As it happened in many cases through history of 20<sup>th</sup> century, neutrality, without but also with support of stronger partner, was trampled on. As an example could serve Belgian neutrality backed by Great Britain but exploited and broken by second German Empire that turned Belgian lands in war area against their will. We can assume that success of neutrality is limited and it is very easy to violate.

In 1938, Per Albin Hansson as Prime Minister said in Oslo that Social Democrat party is not prepared to hold absolute neutrality of Sweden. They must look further than neutrality, have to make right decision in case that neutrality would fail and would have to choose sides<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Hojda, *Jako ježek v nebezpečí. Klikaté cesty švédské neutrality za druhé světové*, p.2.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/200?opendocument>

<sup>14</sup> M. Gunnar Hagglof, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Apr., 1960), p. 153-167.

<sup>15</sup> Hagglof, *International Affairs*, p. 153-167.

<sup>16</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 14.

In the case of the Swedish Kingdom; its neutrality was armed. Systematic building of defence has proved to be effective mean to turn down potential attackers. Its level, though not high, together with natural conditions were believed to manage to hold off the German attack in the beginning of the war<sup>17</sup>. Swedish defence capacity had risen to the level that, together with development of international situation, enabled change in the attitude of Swedish politicians towards Germany and the level of their mutual trade.

Neutrality as concept was characterised by certain rules bound by sovereign countries claiming to be neutral in military conflict. Some of these rules were broken during the Second World War by Sweden still claiming to be bound by its rules, such as not allowing belligerent troops to travel through neutral territory or provide war material to belligerent armies. I will discuss these exceptions in further chapters and I will provide historical data showing reasons behind this behaviour.

## **A Potential Theater of War**

Sweden's geopolitical character was of a small country fixated on continental Europe, especially Germany which was able to break connections of Scandinavia with the West and in case of conflict it would be possible that they will control the whole Baltic Sea. Foreign trade was vital for Sweden, therefore its manoeuvring space in foreign policy was considerably reduced. With the need of strong war fleet and maintaining trade relations with Scandinavia, Germany had to gain control of the Baltic Sea in case of conflict. It would accomplish this by occupying Danish straits and Norwegian coast which would then shield the whole Scandinavia from the British influence. The British viewed Norway as a gun pointed on their belly. During the entire war, after their loss in Narvik, British command was pondering the idea of Norwegian invasion and have fixated the Wehrmacht's 25th armoured division in Norway.

Economic and geopolitical importance of Swedish export was enormously significant for the Third Reich, which counted with the Baltic Sea blockade in case of war. The significance was so high that the upper echelons of German command did not rule out the possibility of a military action

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<sup>17</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.513.



against this region which would ensure the necessary supply of products and materials, should the concept of positive neutrality towards Germany fail<sup>18</sup>.

At the beginning of war, Scandinavia was at risk of becoming the first site of greater clashes. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had shaken the whole international system of the time, particularly in Northern Europe. Finland, attacked by the Soviet Union, received material, financial, diplomatic and volunteer aid from Sweden. During this conflict, the relations in the North were quite tense because many Western powers sympathised with stubborn Finnish struggle. Great Britain and France started pondering military intervention and they tried to aggressively put this idea through Scandinavian governments. They met with resistance because Scandinavians did not want to drag themselves to war. Moreover, this action could infringe Swedish and Norwegian neutrality, as well as directly endanger German supply of iron ore which would undoubtedly provoke Germany to take action. As was already mentioned, Swedish iron ore was extremely important for Germany. To ensure its supply, Germany even considered military action. According to this possible scenario, the Soviets and Germans would probably divide Finland and Sweden between themselves in the beginning of World War II which would probably strengthen the alliance predicted by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The concern about this development intensified the friction in Northern Europe that lasted until the signing of the peace treaty between Finland and the Soviet Union- the end of the Winter War.

Gunnar Hägglöf, a Swedish diplomat, heavily criticized the inconsiderate course of the Allies during the first phase of the war, as well as the friction that led to Operation Weserübung. In his studies, he blames the Allies for the attack on Norway and Denmark and he points to the legacy of these events in following years of the war<sup>19</sup>.

## **Sweden during the Second World War and phases of its Neutrality**

When Poland was attacked and the Second World War started, Sweden and its neighbours reacted with declaration of neutrality. In the case of Sweden, this neutrality was at least once infringed and it was bended several times to avoid a military conflict. In the case of its neighbours, their neutrality was ignored and aggressively broken by the Soviet Union and Germany. Swedish policy was changing during the whole conflict which was influenced by the events of the inter-war period

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<sup>18</sup> Tadeusz Konecki, *Skandynawia w drugiej wojnie światowej: od neutralności i pacyfizmu do militarizmu i wyścigu zbrojeń*. (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Hägglöf, *International Affairs*, p. 158.

and events during the war era. Even though the public and the government sympathised with the Western powers, they had to lead real politics based on Swedish geographic position, military options and economic needs<sup>20</sup>.

Swedish policy of neutrality was transformed during the conflict; sometimes, it was even crossing its borders. The tendencies of foreign policy can be divided to different phases which are set by important events. These events caused a turn in the war and a possibility of geopolitical change in immediate proximity of Sweden which had to be quickly reacted upon by Swedish politicians. Some of the authors connect these phases and some divide them– it depends on the opinion on importance of the events that affected the development of Swedish foreign policy.

Joachim divides this era to four phases. The first one starts with the attack on Poland and ends with the beginning of the Winter War. The second phase follows, ending with German attack on Denmark and Norway in 1940. During the third phase, Sweden virtually became Germany's ally until the turn in the war which happened, according to Joachim, in the beginning of 1943 when Wehrmacht lost at Stalingrad and in northern Africa. Joachim dates the fourth and last phase from this turn to the end of the war and characterizes it with Swedish moving towards the West. This division observes the development of foreign policy under the influence of the events that directly affected Sweden<sup>21</sup>.

Nordstrom uses similar division but, contrary to Joachim, he connects Joachim's first and second phase and divides his third one. This division follows the development of neutrality more than the policies in general. In the first phase, he views Sweden as neutral even though it declared itself as a non-fighting country in the case of Finland while Joachim distinguishes between these two terms. Nordstrom does not consider the battle of Stalingrad and the fights in Northern Africa to be so important and outstanding events that could change the whole course of Swedish politics. He regards the summer of 1944 as a turning point during which Sweden became more and more an ally of the West and the Swedish-German trade gradually started to fade out. Finally it ended in January 1945<sup>22</sup>.

I will divide this period into 5 phases because I consider the Winter War and the summer of 1944 to be important international events that influenced the course of Swedish politics. All the aforementioned events meant an impulse from abroad that was reacted on by Swedish politicians so they had to lead a balanced policy of armed neutrality and compromise with Germany to prevent being a target of future German expansion. This policy shifted according to important turning points during

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<sup>20</sup> Konecki, *Skandynawia w drugiej wojnie światowej: od neutralności i pacyfizmu do militarizmu i wyścigu zbrojeń*, p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Joesten Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, (Foreign Affairs; January 1945, Vol. 23 Issue 2), p. 324-329.

<sup>22</sup> Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia since 1500*, (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 315-317.

the war; Sweden was basically buying the time to build their defence and to be able to avoid future possibility of intervention. The compromises guaranteed to the Third Reich were of little military importance; except for the guarantee to transfer a whole Engelbrecht division consisting of 15,000 troops which crossed Sweden's mainland in trains on the way from Norway to Finland and to the Eastern Front. When the threat from German side passed over, trade treaties were cancelled and Germany lost a source of natural resources.

In general, Operation Barbarossa is not considered as turning point in the history of Swedish neutrality. They were never asked to join attack as other German allies and satellites. German attitude did not change, it just continued from events during Operation "Wasserübung" and no major concessions were demanded. The fact that Sweden was not in camp of allies and satellites after complete isolation, could be considered as a result of flexible foreign policy. On the other hand, trade with iron ore was uninterrupted so Germany took from this relationship reasonable maximum it needed to support her war machine to launch attack on east.

During the keeping balance in relation with Germany, Sweden created an enclave in Europe controlled by Nazis; thousands of war refugees and European Jews found asylum there. The Swedish actively worked within humanitarian missions during which they negotiated with Germany about transferring the prisoners of war and they saved many lives. This argument is significantly inclined to favour the defence of Swedish neutrality as such<sup>23</sup>.

## **Phase One: From the Attack on Poland to the Inception of the Winter War**

The tense international situation that preceded the attack on Poland affected the entire Scandinavia that was threatened only indirectly, yet it closely observed the whole development. In July 1939, the Swedish attaché in Warsaw informed his superiors about the attitude of Polish Government towards German danger. He claimed that the Third Reich does not have such military power to risk guilt from breakdown of another armed conflict. The news about signing the Molotov-

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<sup>23</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.502.

Ribbentrop Pact of Non-Aggression was very surprising and it had shaken the international relations at the time<sup>24</sup>.

The first phase of the war, called “phony war” or “Sitzkrieg”, lasted from 1st September to the 30th November 1939, beginning of the Winter War. During this phase, Sweden announced the declaration of neutrality based on the Hague Convention from 1907. The defence expenses had risen and the government had taken a rigorously neutral stand, even though they sympathised with the Allies. The attack on Poland and its minimal possibilities of defence were perceived as another failure of western allies. Swedish media started commenting this inaction, even though the government tried to limit them in order to preserve the neutrality and to remain impartial. The constraint of media, a form of censorship, will be carried on during the entire conflict to endorse the official course of international policy<sup>25</sup>.

The attack of the Soviet Union on neutral Finland, Swedish reaction and shift in its attitude towards foreign policy brought this phase to its end.

## **Phase Two: From the Winter War 1939 to the Attack on Denmark and Norway 1940**

After Soviet Union’s pressure on Baltic states, its claim on territories in Karelia and the lease of bases in Hanko peninsula that would directly threaten Finnish capital Helsinki, the whole North joined together. It refused the Russian conditions and declared its solidarity with Finland, even though no military obligations were adopted.

The alleged Finnish artillery attack near the village of Mainila on the Soviet Union border guards started a conflict that put Sweden into a position where its traditional enemy attacked Finland which shared its history and its minority with Sweden; Sweden also considered Finland to be its buffer state. Denmark and Norway declared their neutrality immediately after the attack while Sweden broke its neutrality and claimed to be a non-belligerent country.

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<sup>24</sup> Konecki, *Skandynawia w drugiej wojnie światowej: od neutralności i pacyfizmu do militaryzmu i wyścigu zbrojeń*, p. 23.

<sup>25</sup> Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, p. 325.

This status enabled Sweden to indirectly support fighting Finland by official tolerance of 8000 trained volunteers that departed from Sweden to fight in Finnish front lines<sup>26</sup>, by emptying half of its ammunition storages and even by money collection among its citizens that gained 500 million Swedish crowns (125 million USD) which were sent to Finland<sup>27</sup>.

Finnish struggle against any odds was admired all around the world, yet the sending of effective military aid depended only on Sweden and Norway. The access from the South was blocked by Germany and from North by the Soviet Union. The only possible way led through the neutral and non-belligerent countries that had to give their permission for such an action. The official offer to transfer and strengthen the Finnish forces with their divisions came from Great Britain and France, yet it never happened. Sweden also considered the occupation and fortification of Åland Islands but it dismissed this idea for the concern of strong Soviet reaction that was limited during the time to official protest notes concerning the Swedish support of Finland. On 13th March 1940, after breaking Finnish defence and endangering Helsinki, it was eventually possible to sign a peace treaty between Finland and the USSR with a help from Swedish and German diplomats<sup>28</sup>.

Despite the pressure of interventionists and their motto: "Finland's case is ours!" the government resisted to participate in the conflict because of the adverse international situation. Further political energy of critics of government was diverted in activism in favour of the Finnish which gave Swedish government space for negotiating truce to stabilize the region. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that created a non-aggression alliance between the Soviet Union and Germany, was already in effect during the time of the conflict and it was quite possible that after Swedish taking part in combat, this relationship would strengthen. Sweden would then be at risk of possible invasion that would be impossible to resist for a longer period of time. Even if the Allies came to aid Sweden, its territory would change into a war area. Naturally, Swedish government wanted to avoid this situation.<sup>29</sup>.

Sweden did not allow the transfer of French and British troops, mainly because of fear that Germany could understand this act as a declaration of war and a possible threat to the supply of Swedish iron ore. The possibility of fighting on Swedish territory was vigorously refused even when the defence of Western democratic countries was in question because of their active endeavour to build and keep collective security and their frustration with the attitude of Western powers and with their foreign policy overall.

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<sup>26</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.504.

<sup>27</sup> Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, p. 326.

<sup>28</sup> Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, p. 327.

<sup>29</sup> Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, p. 327.

Swedish political attitude changed after Germany had attacked Denmark and Norway. These states were not prepared for aggression of any kind, unlike Sweden which was systematically building its defence. Sweden once again found itself under pressure to decide whether to intervene or to hold to its neutral status.

### **Phase Three: From the Attack on Denmark and Norway 1940 to the War Turning Point in 1943**

Germany planned to attack the North so they could precede British and French in actions in Scandinavia. Also British actions in coast of Norway and aspirations to disrupt Swedish iron ore export to Germany could be counted as a reason why Hitler decided to execute operation “Weserübung”. Sweden was again in danger of being dragged into war. Even though Swedish diplomatic dispatches reported the concentration of German troops in Baltic harbours, they stated that Sweden is not directly threatened. Despite this information, Swedish troops were transferred to the South of the country to fortify the observation posts. Considerable resources began to be set from the state budget to finance the defence<sup>30</sup>.

On 9th April 1940, Germany started Operation Weserübung, attack on Denmark and Norway. Wehrmacht demonstrated its power during blitzkrieg on Poland and nobody expected anything else in case of attack on Denmark and Norway even in case of armed resistance. After evaluating its situation and the defence possibilities of the two states, Sweden declared neutrality. This happened on 17th June 1940 after the talk between Bjorn Prytz, a Swedish ambassador in London, and R. A. Butler, British under-secretary of Foreign Affairs in which they agreed that Great Britain would make a separate peace with Germany as soon as the conditions were stable. Bjorn Prytz sent this information to Stockholm<sup>31</sup>. The neutral status of Sweden was supported even by Norwegian government that viewed the existence of a neutral state on its borders as a situation with higher potential than possible military aid<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Konecki, *Skandynawia w drugiej wojnie światowej: od neutralności i pacyfizmu do militaryzmu i wyścigu zbrojeń*, p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Krister Wahlback, *Sweden: Secrecy and Neutrality* (Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 2, No. 1), Historians on the Twentieth Century (Jan., 1967), p.183.

<sup>32</sup> Hagglof, *International Affairs*, p. 159.

When Germany advanced through Norway, Sweden found itself in an uncomfortable position. It was surrounded by German army and air forces in Norway and German navy in Skagerrak. Stockholm lost its contact with the West that served as possible military and diplomatic insurance of Swedish neutrality. Allies de-facto retreated from Baltic Sea militarily and diplomatically. Because of this situation, Germany has been in position where Hitler could have made various claims to Swedish government backed by invasion of their neighbours. Ribbentrop-Molotov pact just strengthened Germany's position. In case of armed resistance and war declaration from whole Scandinavia it would be possible that Hitler and Stalin would divide and conquer this area according to their sphere of influence.

Germany demanded particularly the opening of railways to transport soldiers and military material to the North, to Narvik and Trondheim, to support the invasion. Even though the Swedish government resisted these demands, it eventually had to partially fulfil them. Swedish leaders found themselves in impossible position where they could only delay German influence in form of concessions<sup>33</sup>.

Only a transport of humanitarian aid for German soldiers in British siege beyond Narvik was agreed on. However, Norway argued that some military material was smuggled into the country along with the aid; this claim was not officially affirmed by Sweden. This compromise was accepted with awareness that it directly infringes the neutrality convention that Sweden assigned to. Nevertheless, it was necessary to ease the German pressure. The transports could help the German army to break the siege in Narvik and to end the campaign in Norway. While compromising with Germany, Sweden accepted Norwegian soldiers in their borders, despite of German protests. Questionable was whether Wehrmacht would stop after conquering Norway which was unclear and Sweden had to prepare to deal with this threat or prevent this possibility. It is true that Germans feared possible defeat at Narvik so they desperately needed support from Sweden, even though limited. Swedes agreed only on concessions of humanitarian help and supplies because there was no possible way to aid Wehrmacht militarily when they were fighting Norwegians.

In May 1940, the Netherlands and Belgium, neutral countries, backed by Great Britain and France, were attacked. Their neutrality was inconsiderately violated so Swedish concessions were based on fear and actual events that could happen at their home soil. Germany was able to force concessions not only by invasion but also by attack on main Swedish urban areas. These were defenceless against Luftwaffe air attacks due to almost non-existent fighter air force. On top of that,

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<sup>33</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 24.

Sweden's military situation and supplies were on a bad level. Baltic States had been invaded by Soviet Union, dividing of sphere of influence continued. In light of these events, German concessions practically changed to ultimatums. Swedish leaders had very little space to negotiate and manoeuvre. Bilateral meetings changed to how to concede rather than whether to concede. In the conclusion, negotiations with Germany about concessions seemed to be the most reasonable way of action based on state of affairs<sup>34</sup>.

In the last days of Norwegian campaign, Sweden almost succeeded in negotiating its own occupying zone around Narvik that would be under Swedish, not German control. However, the treaty that was signed 3rd June 1940 in Luleå was not ratified by the Germans because Norwegian government fled to London and the overall situation changed. After being allowed to transport medical material, Germany again started to put pressure on Sweden and to demand further usage of Swedish connection to the North and the middle part of Norway. They wanted to transfer a part of the invasion army on this route, leaving only occupation forces in Norway. Swedish government resisted this demand but eventually gave in because of the international situation and growing power of Wehrmacht.

At time of further negotiations, Germany celebrated victories all over the Western Europe, Belgium and the Netherlands surrendered, Paris was captured and Italy joined the conflict. It seemed only reasonable to negotiate and save themselves from fate of most of Europe.<sup>35</sup>

The negotiations of 5th July 1940 resulted in so-called "leave traffic" which were three railway routes on which German soldiers could be evacuated. On these routes operated a limited number of trains that were used by the German army. They connected Kornsjö on southern Swedish-Norwegian borders with Helsingborg where ferries were dispatched, Narvik with Helsingborg and Trondheim with Narvik through Swedish territory. This connection was called "horseshoe traffic". Sweden insisted that the soldiers must travel unarmed, only with bayonets while officers were allowed to have a personal gun. There could be maximum of 500 soldiers per train so that they would be unable to engage hostilities while on Swedish territory. Train schedule was also limited. Route Narvik-Trondheim, used mainly to support Narvik operations, could be dispatched once per week, as well as route Kornsjö –Trelleborg near Malmö and then ferry ride to Germany. Swedes also made sure that incoming forces at least matched outgoing so Germans would not build up the number of soldiers in Norway. All armaments were to be loaded to the train cars behind the soldiers. However, this condition was not always satisfied. After the Operation Barbarossa started on 22nd June 1941, Sweden

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<sup>34</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.505.

<sup>35</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 24.



was addressed with another demand – to allow a transfer of whole Engelbrecht infantry division from Norway through Sweden to Finland. Riksdag agreed with this demand, claiming that it is an aid for fighting Finland which was dragged into the attack on the Soviet Union and that it was only one-time exception<sup>36</sup>. Strengthened east borders with German troops also ceased need for Sweden to enter war and sent soldiers to Finland. Thus, Sweden made another compromise for Germany that was at the top of its military strength and was building up forces on east.

General Olof Thörnell, the leader of Swedish military forces, argued in his government report from 1942 that it would be only logical for Swedish army to take part in the German campaign and to help to defeat the Soviet Union. The reasons of General Thörnell for this claim were strengthening of the Eastern border, ensuring of Finnish position and keeping the war out of Swedish territory, for everything indicated that Germany was going to win the war. On the one hand, Sweden sympathised with Nazi Germany that was endeavouring to suppress Bolshevism. On the other hand, pragmatic Swedes were not content with exploitation and infringement of international agreements and treaties which was a common practice in Germany. But General Thörnell never really insisted on taking part in the Operation Barbarossa so an active involvement of Swedish forces in Finland never came to existence<sup>37</sup>.

The public opinion was on the side of the Allies mirrored to the open criticism of compromises with Germany, mainly condemning the transfer of the Engelbrecht division<sup>38</sup>. The officers were mostly pro-German and Hitler was well aware of this fact, being able to use it in case of attacking Sweden. During this most questionable phase of neutrality that was inclined towards Germany, Swedish government had to influence the domestic media to preserve the unanimous course of foreign policy. The government act from 1940 enabled the government to confiscate an issue of any magazine or newspaper that could irritate a foreign power<sup>39</sup>. During those years, Swedish elite believed that Germany would win the war; therefore it was in their interest to maintain the best possible relations, even though Sweden was under the constant threat of occupation. They maintained the relations not only by balanced compromising policies but also by strong defence that was systematically built since 1936. With limited inner censorship, they wanted to force the media and the public opinion to become neutral as well because in the beginning of 1943, the German invasion seemed more than likely to happen and flexible foreign policy was the only way how to prevent it.

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<sup>36</sup> Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, p. 328.

<sup>37</sup> Krister Wahlback, *Neutrality and Morality: The Swedish Experience*, 104.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.506

<sup>39</sup> Wahlback, *Neutrality and Morality: The Swedish Experience*, 106.

Swedish foreign trade was almost exclusively focused on Germany in this phase, even though Sweden was initially able to have minimal trade connection with Great Britain which was later being ceased by Germany. Export and import of isolated Sweden could be oriented only towards Germany where Sweden exported its iron ore and ball bearings while Germany supplied its need of coal for heating and coke for industrial purposes. Without these imported goods, the country would face closing of factories, social disorders and freezing of the population because logging was not large enough to satisfy the need for heating materials. The SKF Company exported ready-made ball bearings that were very valuable for Germany, as well as iron ore that could have been exported without infringing the neutrality status in international law. It was therefore more of a moral problem because Sweden indirectly supported German military industry to avoid occupation<sup>40</sup>. Even though the Great Britain repeatedly urged the cutting down of the export, it did not happen until the mid-1944<sup>41</sup>.

During the period between April 1940 and summer 1943, Sweden had to overpass and overdraw the limits of its neutrality in order to avoid German retaliatory action. Although it is possible that Sweden agreed on “leave traffic” and the transportation of the Engelbrecht division could weaken German contingent in Norway and lower down the possibility of military action against Sweden in 1943, the attack from Norway was the most probable. However, these transports were not of large military importance, only one infantry division was transported. It was more a question of legal and moral integrity and political concessions<sup>42</sup>. German leaders were many times dissatisfied with Sweden attitude towards new order in Europe set by them. What were Swedish defence options and did Sweden have a realistic chance to defend itself against German invasion?

## **Options of Swedish Military Defence**

Ability of Sweden to protect itself was very important argument which supported whole policy of armed neutrality. Development and composition of defence forces is thus important aspect of ability to deter or resist any possible violation of Swedish neutral status.

Swedish defence budget was rising since the League of Nations abandoned their sanctions policy during the inter-war period. It rose from 50 million USD in 1938 to 400 million USD in the following year and then to 600 million USD at the end of the war. Swedish forces were permanently

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<sup>40</sup> Wahlback, *Neutrality and Morality: The Swedish Experience*, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Swedish Neutrality and Its Abandonment, <http://www.iticu.edu.tr/yayin/dergi/s11/M00167.pdf>, p. 186.

<sup>42</sup> Wahlback, *Neutrality and Morality: The Swedish Experience*, p. 111.

embattled. The army of 600 000 men, as well as 110 000 women in voluntary units called Lotta Corps, had to mobilize several times due to international events that endangered Sweden. This of course brought failures in workforce on farms, factories and in woods that was needed to gain timber for heating because the import of coal from Germany could be stopped at any time. The official order in case of invasion stated in the official government statement “Directions for citizens of Kingdom in the event of war”<sup>43</sup>, was to fight occupants and in any case cease the resistance.

From interwar period, there were four possible scenarios of attack on Sweden, three from Russia, one very unlikely from Germany. Because of threat from the East, Åland Islands, very close to Stockholm and Finnish Turku, played important role in securing entrance to Gulf of Bothnia and were very important issue for Swedish interwar period foreign policy. In the end, islands were demilitarized and remilitarization was many times attempted but never executed. Defence scenarios and thus policy of Ministry of Defence changed many times during the war, based on development of affairs and immediate threats<sup>44</sup>.

General preparedness of Swedish armed forces was quite poor considering of how big capacity German or Russian armed forces were. But in contrast to Norwegian and Danish forces they possessed capability to resist possible attack with more success. Major weakness which haunted Swedish high command was lacking of air-force capable of defending urban areas. In the beginning of war, there were 150 obsolete biplanes which could not be even compared with Luftwaffe or Russian air-force. Only anti-air regiments were capable to deploy on frontiers and protect Swedish air space but they did not possess equipment and training to fight night bombing raids so their effectiveness was questionable in case of full scale air attack. Infantry received training during war years and were planned to be deployed in same manner as Finnish infantry in case of Karelia against Russians. Artillery regiments were equipped with obsolete guns and they had no anti-tank capacity in the beginning of war. Navy had obsolete battle cruisers and small submarine fleet focused on patrolling coast and defending cities. Reviews on Sweden’s military defence capability were sent to Germany on regular basis and only few times they exaggerated actual stance.

Huge amount of the resources was aimed to re-arm, train and expand armed forces so they could deter any possible violation of Swedish neutral stance. Purchasing big machines of war, such as ships, planes and tanks was huge problem. Before blockade, planes and war material was ordered and bought in the United States but for their military production the priority was to arm Great Britain, thus Sweden’s order was never met. After 1940 and the blockade of Skagerrak, it was impossible to import

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<sup>43</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.507.

<sup>44</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 221.

arms without intervention of Germany and Great Britain. Great Britain did not want strong armed Sweden after concessions made after fall of Narvik and they confiscated four destroyers bought in Italy by Swedes anchored in Faroe Islands. Germany, on the other hand, sold some military equipment to Sweden for iron ore shipments. But they also did not want armed neutral country with ties to Allies on their borders. Investment in home arms production followed. Companies as Husquarna, Volvo and Ericsson were involved and produced vehicles and other military equipment. AB Bofors continued with production of artillery guns and SAAB Company invested in development and production of new fighter planes. Over 70 new, mostly light, ships were assembled in dockyards to strengthen navy capacity. As soon as it was possible, purchases from the United States resumed and Sweden could strengthen their air-force with new Mustang fighter-bombers.

Similar to foreign policy and development of neutrality, strategy, tactics and overall armed capability were shaped by war events and immediate threats. In 1939 at the beginning of the Winter War, Commander –in-Chief, General Olof Thörnell pushed for deployment of Swedish troops in Finland to counter their traditional enemy outside of their territory. This request was never met and help to Finland was only political and humanitarian. Sweden as non-belligerent, not neutral state allowed sending volunteers, medical supplies, arms and ammunition which in conclusion weakened their own defence ability. Troops were sent to Norrland, land border between Finland and Sweden to resist possible Russian advance towards iron ore mines. They even assembled and provided airplanes from west to Finnish battlefronts. Germany, due to peace pact with Soviet Union was unable to provide arms to Finland, the only possibility for resupply was therefore only from west. Ceasing hostilities in Finland was important for stability in region and to replenish ammunition warehouses and disband troops deployed in cold and hostile Norrland<sup>45</sup>.

In the eve of Operation “Wesserübung“, Swedish defence undergone another fearfull moment. Although it was clear that German building up of troops on German Baltic coast will not attack Sweden, armed forces went to full alert. In 1940, possibility of German assault could hit west coast around city of Göteborg, thus defensive line, also known as “Per-Albin Line”(Per Albin Hansson) was built and garrisoned. But in event of attack on Norway, it was only lightly occupied and lacked large numbers of armament like machineguns. Conscripts were mobilized and started to prepare to defend iron mines in north, mountain passages to inland Sweden and repel possible paratrooper drops on whole area. Swedish soldiers just witnessed struggle of ill-armed Norwegian army and speed of German Blitzkrieg and full air superiority which did not stop until hitting Narvik. Lack of air cover and enemy air superiority were weakness of Swedish defense which was generally known. Norwegian campaign was matter of prestige for Hitler who took personal interest in battle planning. Huge amount

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<sup>45</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 226.

of pressure lied on Swedish coalition government which was asked for concessions in form of horseshoe traffic reinforcement of Narvik battlefield. Ability to counter these demands to the form that they caused minimal military advantage in fear of rolling German war machine was also thanks to mobilized defense<sup>46</sup>.

Hitler viewed the stability and material base of the north-western wing as a priority even if it meant the invasion. That is why he ordered working out a plan called "Arctic Fox"<sup>47</sup>. Plan was prepared by general von Schnell. It counted with the advance of German troops from Norway to the East where they should conquer Stockholm and destroy the Swedish forces that were concentrated in the North of the lake Vänern. The original plan counted with 17 divisions, two of which had to be armoured, 25<sup>th</sup> armoured division was garrisoned in Norway and was supposed to lead attack. Because of the needs of the Eastern line, Germany was not able to provide such resources for the capture of Sweden. Germany also counted with the fact that more than 70% of the officers are pro-German. However, Swedish soldiers would have had the advantage of knowing the domestic terrain and of civilian sympathies. On the other hand, Sweden would be directly threatened by Luftwaffe attacks which would in case of invasion be able to endanger all big cities without any problem.

German report from 1941 stated that Swedes could deploy in 48 hours two divisions in north to protect iron ore mines. Weakness was in amount of supplies stored in Sweden. Coal and fuel oil would be in case of total blockade scarce. British expectancy was two weeks of resistance, Swedish expected three months due to saving and proper distribution of supplies. Germans reported re-armed and trained soldiers in 1943 but lacking heavy anti-air and artillery capability, tanks and air-force. Also soldiers lacked any form of combat experience. Swedish coast was well defended by 210 mm guns with 30 kilometre firing range. The long borderline with Norway went through the Scandinavian Mountains which meant that the infantry and armoured attack could be led only through mountain passes that were easy to defend. During the mobilisation training in autumn 1943, Sweden mobilised half a million of soldiers in infantry divisions, armoured and motorised brigades, cavalry and artillery regiments. The border was defended by anti-aircraft and anti-tank batteries with 105 mm artillery and 360 military airplanes could be sent in the air<sup>48</sup>.

Swedish strengths were in infantry training in combat in adverse terrain. Infantry could be deployed similarly as in Finland. Plan prepared by general von Schnell was focused on armoured thrust through open plains using tanks and motorized infantry supported by Luftwaffe. They planned

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<sup>46</sup> Gilmour, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin: The Swedish experience in the Second World War*, p. 228.

<sup>47</sup> Hojda, *Jako ježek v nebezpečí. Klikaté cesty švédské neutrality za druhé světové války*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Konecki, *Skandynawia w drugiej wojnie światowej: od neutralności i pacyfizmu do militaryzmu i wyścigu zbrojeń*, p. 348.

to move in two directions, from Trondheim to Sundsvall on east coast and from southern borders through southern Sweden to Stockholm supported by landings from Finland. This scenario was very possible in April 1943. Preventive attack on Sweden will prevent the army to join allied landings in Norway that was expected. Although invasion plan on Sweden could be executed without excuse of allied landings, German forces never built up so they could launch invasion.

Hitler was discouraged from attacking Sweden by the problems with Norwegian campaign, the concern about the preparedness of Swedish army and by the resistance of Swedish population. Because of a new combat line opened in Italy, German troops were transferred to Italy and France and the plan to invade Sweden was abandoned. Thanks to this international development, Swedish army did not have to face German invasion<sup>49</sup>.

## **Phase Four: From the Landings of Allies in Italy in 1943 to the First Half of 1944**

Since the turning point in the war, Swedish government inclined more and more towards the Allies. After the concern about German attack was eased down, Sweden informed Germany about stopping the “leave traffic” and the mutual relationships worsened. Germans started to attack Swedish courier planes and ships.

Swedish export to Germany could finally be limited as the Allies demanded because the threat of Germany started to diminish and Sweden managed to gather some reserves during previous years. Thanks to its neutrality and German dependence on its export, Sweden could help to shorten the war with economic sanctions. While in 1943 Sweden sent 10 200 000 tons of iron ore to Germany, in 1944 it was only 7 100 000 tons. In 1943, Sweden exported ball bearings worth 15 000 000 dollars, in 1944 it was only 7 500 000 dollars and on 13th June 1944 only 20% of the military export<sup>50</sup>. This dramatic change was sped up by the opening of the Western front in Normandy, as well as by the advancement of the Soviet troops in the East. In the last years of war, Sweden provided their support to the Allies, for the benefit of which they infringed their neutrality again. It provided Britain with intelligence information; they sold the plans of a crashed V-2 missile and enabled the building of a British radio station on Swedish territory<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p. 508.

<sup>50</sup> Joachim, *Phases in Swedish Neutrality*, p. 329.

<sup>51</sup> Hojda, *Jako ježek v nebezpečí. Klikaté cesty švédské neutrality za druhé světové války*, p.4

By preserving its neutrality and not taking part in the war, Sweden not only helped to speed up the end of the war but also effectively supported the advancement of the Allies through Europe. Sweden also functioned as an island of freedom in Europe controlled by Nazis. This fourth phase can be seen as a transition period of balanced neutrality that in the first half of 1944 developed to neutrality inclined towards the Allies. During this period, the result of the conflict was not yet clear, even though after the battle at Kursk and the fall of Mussolini's regime in Italy, Sweden started to reduce the compromises and the level of mutual trade with Germany. The agreement about transport and German using of Swedish railways was terminated and at the end of 1943, Sweden was open to refugees from the whole Europe. Some of the censorship arrangements in Swedish press were also abandoned<sup>52</sup>.

## **Sweden's Aid to Its Neighbours**

In general, Sweden justifies its neutrality by humanitarian actions during the entire period and by accepting refugees. The fact that a country in Nazi occupied Europe accepted refugees, saved thousands of lives, mainly a great part of Danish and Norwegian Jewish community. During the air raids in German cities, the pilots that were shot down could seek asylum in the country. Refugees were coming during the whole conflict, especially after beginning of Operation „Wessertübung”, as well as the Winter War.

Sweden provided asylum and support for example via the organization Svenska Norgehjälpen which provided material and nutrition aid to Norway since 1942. During the conflict, supplies and food were gathered in Swedish storages to be sent to its neighbours immediately after the hostilities ceased. Sweden also declared its own form of Marshall Plan for Scandinavia with which it helped to start the after-war recovery and it lent 150 million Swedish Crowns to Norway.<sup>53</sup> Norwegians and Danes went to Canada through Sweden or they stayed there and were trained as police that was supposed to keep order in their countries after the withdrawal of Wehrmacht. These police forces underwent, among other things, also artillery training. Swedish diplomats achieved important humanitarian goals, such as the active participation of Swedish ambassador in Budapest, Raoul

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<sup>52</sup> Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia since 1500*, (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 318.

<sup>53</sup> Konecki, *Skandynawia w drugiej wojnie światowej: od neutralności i pacyfizmu do militaryzmu i wyścigu zbrojeń*, p. 411.

Wallenberg, in rescuing Hungarian Jews, or Duke Folke Bernadotte who negotiated with Germany the release of 14 000 prisoners from concentration camps<sup>54</sup>.

After the war ended, Sweden actively participated in the recovery of Europe. For example, it reconstructed the Gdansk harbour in exchange for Polish coal<sup>55</sup>. Swedish shipyards that were not damaged during the war could start with the after-war recovery of destroyed trade fleets.

## **Phase Five: From the Second Half of 1944 to the End of War in 1945**

The last phase of Swedish neutrality started in the half of 1944 that was most distinctively influenced by the Normandy landings and that foresaw the loss of Germany. Swedish neutrality inclined more and more towards the Allies and the West. This tendency was most visible in limitations of Swedish-German trade. The Allies demanded its limitation as well as termination of trade agreements. In September, Swedish harbours in the Baltic Sea closed down to German trade and all trade connections were terminated in January 1945<sup>56</sup>.

The capitulation of Germany brought to an end incongruent and often discussed period of Swedish history. Thanks to the preservation of production capacities and with the help of its industry, Sweden played an important role in the after-war recovery of Europe. It also represented a guarantor of stability in northern Europe. Social unrest and advancing influence of communism from the Soviet Union did not particularly affect this region, except Finland. This development predicted the future and involvement of the Scandinavian region during the following years of the Cold War.

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<sup>54</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.510

<sup>55</sup> Demaree Bess, *Swedes are out of bussines*, (The Saturday Evening Post, 22.9.1945)

<sup>56</sup> Byron J. Nordstrom, *Scandinavia since 1500*, p. 318.



## Evaluation of the Neutrality Policy

Despite the fact that King Gustav V. was distinctively pro-German during World War I, during World War II he actively promoted the preservation of neutrality and avoiding the military conflict. The neutrality policy was Swedish goal and a result of consensus within Swedish society.

By the analysis of the economic situation, pre-war international politics and the politics within the League of Nations, I tried to explain why Sweden decided for the course of military non-intervention, even though the fights took place close to its borders. It supported its neighbours only materially, humanitarially and diplomatically. After the collective security system failed, Sweden was in the state of disillusioned isolationism, disappointed by the attitude of the powers and by the policy of appeasement. After 1938, Sweden withdrawn from the international organizations and decided to rely on its armed neutrality. Why should it participate in a conflict that it did not cause and that it tried to avert at all costs? Why should Sweden help its neighbours that were not prepared for the conflict, therefore it was resolved from beginning? In any case, the Allies benefited from Swedish neutrality more than Germany. The necessity to trade with iron ore and ball bearings enabled Swedish government at least regulate this exchange of goods and materials. If Sweden had been occupied, these resources would have probably been destroyed by Sweden itself or by Great Britain or decimated because of German military needs and Swedish industry that was crucial for the after-war recovery of Europe would not have existed. The civil population would have suffered from the shortage of reserves, coal for heating and food. Sweden undoubtedly contributed to the ending of the war with big part, despite of their trade links with Germany. If Sweden had participated in fighting, militarily opposed Germany, and paralysed a part of German army, would this strategy have been more beneficial for the ending of the war than the policies that Sweden pursued? The fact is that Swedish army was not large; it could fight for a longer period of time because of the geographic character of the country but Sweden itself would not oppose Germany for long. It was dependent on import which made it vulnerable in the case of blockade. Even though Sweden disposed of high quality anti-aircraft arsenal, Bofors guns<sup>57</sup>, German aircraft superiority and the closeness of German aircraft bases made Swedish cities easy targets for air-based attack. Sweden provided the Allies with intelligence information, as well as the certainty that Northern Europe would remain stable and that social unrest or even communist coups as in other parts of Europe would not occur there.

Keeping Sweden out of World War II was not strictly a result of neutrality but more of pragmatic policy that often crossed the limits of the Hague Convention. Swedish politicians who

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<sup>57</sup> Scott, *Sweden Nation's History*, p.507.

respected laws and international agreements, were facing an immense power controlling Europe and to save their country, they had to go beyond the conventions.

Second World War never became part of the national memory of Swedes mainly because there weren't any material or human losses. There wasn't any turning-point in history as were in other belligerent states. Consensus is that Sweden deviated from neutrality; but it kept resistant policy towards Germany and this allowed it to contribute to major effort for peace and after-war reconstruction. However, memory of performance during war is problematic even nowadays. There are arguments that support realpolitik of Swedish government which occurred in 1940's and persisted during whole Cold war era. Johan Östling characterizes this policy as small-state realistic narrative<sup>58</sup>. It combines realpolitik of small state economically tied to its neighbors and threatened by Nazi Germany in the first place. Aiming this policy to preserve nation, their neighbors and peace itself, historians were justifying its performance from World War II during post-war and whole Cold war era years. There were many researches that used this dominant narrative as background to their work; which often served as support of Cold war small-state realism and neutrality which was undergoing in Sweden. There were created many complex works mainly in Swedish language to boost national memory such as Stockholm's Department of History's research '*Sveriges under andra Världskriget*' (SUAV, 'Sweden during the Second World War') or '*Svensk urikespolitik*' ('Swedish foreign policy 1939-1945') by Wilhelm M. Carlgren. Pragmatic policy played major role in works of this era, morality of politics was only touched but never fully developed as topic.

Counter narratives occurred sporadically and they failed to establish serious opposition to small-state realism concept. They rejected small-state realism in general and accused Swedish government of unscrupulous pragmatism; they were based only on moral values and not on power politics. These were arguments of anti-Nazis such as Torgny Segerstedt or Amelie Posse- Brázdová. They accused Swedish government of not seeing a bigger picture of the whole war- a moral struggle between good and evil, between democracy and dictatorship. Other counter-narratives were from Communist and ultra-nationalist point of view.

Communists criticized Swedish Germanophilia through upper class and endorsed role of Soviet Union in result of the war. But unlike in other west European countries, this counter-narrative was never forged in any serious actions and did not had any serious impact on society.

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<sup>58</sup> Henrik Stenius, Mirja Österberg & Johan Östling, eds., *Nordic narratives of the Second World War: national historiographies revisited* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011)p.127

Ultra-nationalists focused on anti-Communism, royalism and patriotism. They were able to develop most genuine counter-narrative contrary to small-state realism narrative but they were scarcely supported and were just a reminder of era that ended in 1945.

Small-state narrative began to be challenged after collapse of the Soviet Union. End of an era and chance to self-examine themselves in late 1980s allowed a shift in narratives to the self-criticism which started with '*Helder och samvete*' ('Honour and conscience') by Maria-Pia Boëthius, followed by Alf E. Johansson, SUAV co-author and his reconsideration of small-state realism. Narrative became focused on morality and Holocaust. It did not blindly follow perspective of coalition government from war era. National sovereignty gave way to international commitment and caused a healthy wave of self-examination and recapitulation of history.

Nevertheless, in 2005 Prime Minister Göran Persson returned to small-state realism when he refused to apologize for actions of government during war in Moscow on Victory Day on sixtieth anniversary. Since then, there are two narratives in Swedish society and it still causes many questions, therefore they offer plenty of space for additional research<sup>59</sup>.

I used references from Nordic narratives because I had no possibility to work with these publications mainly because they are in Swedish so I enclosed references for further interest of reader. Research of Swedish neutrality narratives could be next interesting step in development of topic of Swedish neutrality. In my personal opinion, based on datas I had encountered during research for this thesis, I think that Swedish leaders did as much as they could to prevent war and even to stabilise whole region. There was of course some opportunistic behaviour, mainly in economic and trade sphere but if we are evaluating foreign policy we can assume that outcome was success. Neutrality in form shaped by Swedes during the Second World War had achieved its objectives compared to form of strict neutrality defined by Hague Convention from 1907.

Many people, Europeans and Americans, viewed Swedes as collaborators. However, Swedes had to put up with shortages and fear of war as well<sup>60</sup>. The evidence stated above clearly indicates that despite the conflicting questions, we may consider Swedish neutrality to be justified. Swedish society has changed after the war. Sweden paid back most of its foreign loans; it had strong industry and democratic government. The whole society with all its classes came together to protect the country and to support the government course. People became more emphatic and were able to be satisfied with

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<sup>59</sup> Stenius, Österberg & Östling, *Nordic narratives of the Second World War: national historiographies revisited*, p.130-142.

<sup>60</sup> Demaree Bess, *Swedes are out of bussines*.

less which helped the acceptance of higher government expenses to recover the country and to invest in the world. This public consensus enabled the further development of the social situation and social policy to the state in which we see Sweden today.

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